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American Citizen Services Newsletter December 2008

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SAFETY AND SECURITY SITUATION

We reiterate the State Department's Country Specific Information on Macedonia: The security situation in Macedonia is stable, although occasional criminal violence does occur. Americans should avoid areas with demonstrations, strikes, or roadblocks where large crowds are gathered, particularly those involving political causes or striking workers. Crime in Macedonia is low by U.S. standards, and violent crime against Americans is rare. Pick-pocketing, theft, and other petty street crimes do occur, however, particularly in areas where tourists and foreigners congregate. American travelers are advised to take the same precautions against becoming crime victims as they would in any U.S. city. Valuables, including cell phones and electronic items, should not be left in plain view in unattended vehicles. Windows and doors should be securely locked when residences are not occupied. Organized crime is present in Macedonia; organized criminal activity occasionally results in violent confrontations between members of rival organizations. ATM use is generally safe; however, travelers should take standard safety precautions.

The loss or theft abroad of a U.S. passport should be reported immediately to the local police and the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate. If you are a victim of a crime while overseas, in addition to reporting to the local police, please contact the nearest U.S.

Embassy or Consulate for assistance. The Embassy/Consulate staff can, for example, assist you to find appropriate medical care, to contact family members or friends, and explain how funds could be transferred. Although the investigation and prosecution of the crime is solely the responsibility of local authorities, consular officers can help you to understand the local criminal justice process and find an attorney if needed.

The Worldwide Caution issued for American citizens abroad by the U.S. Department of State regarding the threat of terrorist acts has been updated as of July 16, 2008. For the latest security information, Americans traveling abroad should regularly monitor the Department's website at <http://travel.state.gov>, where up-to-date [Worldwide Caution Public Announcements](#), [Travel Warnings and Public Announcements](#) can be found.

UPCOMING HOLIDAYS

The Embassy will be closed for the following holidays:

- Christmas Day (U.S.) – Thursday, December 25
- Friday, December 26 (President Bush designated this to be a holiday for the Federal Government)
- New Year's Day - Thursday, January 1
- Orthodox Christmas - Wednesday, January 7
- Birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr. - Monday, January 19
- Presidents Day – Monday, February 16

HOLIDAY SECURITY AWARENESS

The U.S. Embassy takes this opportunity to remind everyone to increase their general level of security awareness and take appropriate precautions during the upcoming holiday season. Typically, the holiday season brings a general increase in criminal activity. Below is specific information and guidance on how to keep you and your family safe throughout the holidays.

Keep your perimeter gates, doors, and windows securely locked when no one is at home. Guard against pick-pocketing and other crimes of opportunity, particularly since criminals may become more aggressive in their tactics during this period. Vehicles also represent an excellent target for criminals - not just the vehicle itself, but the items inside. Place all valuables out of sight. This includes bags, briefcases, and other containers that a criminal might imagine could hide something of value.

Never drink and drive! Take a taxi or call a friend for a ride if drinking. Not only do you risk your life and the lives of others, you also are risking your freedom, job, and reputation when you drive under the influence. Even if you do not drink and drive, keep in mind that other drivers on the road may be intoxicated. In conjunction with dim street lighting, poor road conditions, and reckless drivers, the roadways can be a hazardous place for both drivers and pedestrians.

Over the next few weeks, there will be a number of large public events and celebrations throughout Macedonia, including the New Year's celebrations in the city center. These

events attract crowds in the thousands, including criminals looking for vulnerable targets. Many individuals participating in New Year's celebrations will be using alcohol and may display or discharge firearms (what goes up – must come down). Your personal security awareness should address these important issues as well.

MACEDONIAN ENTRY AND RESIDENCE REQUIREMENTS FOR U.S. CITIZENS

Macedonia has enacted changes to its law for foreigners. The law went into effect as of January 1, 2008.

The following is an unofficial summary of key provisions of this law. For the most up-to-date and complete information on entry and residency requirements, contact the Macedonian Ministry of Interior or visit their website at www.moi.gov.mk where the complete text of the Law on Foreigners in both Macedonian and English can be found.

Disclaimer: The U.S. Embassy in Macedonia takes no responsibility for the accuracy of the information in this guide and recommends that applicants for Macedonian visas or residency also contact the nearest Macedonian Embassy or Consulate or the Macedonian Ministry of Interior at www.moi.gov.mk.

Short trip for business or tourism: A valid passport is required for travel to Macedonia. A visa is not required for U.S. passport holders for tourist and business trips up to 90 days during a six-month period. As of September 1, 2008, Macedonia began requiring that all foreign citizens entering the country provide proof of health insurance at the port of entry. Entry stamps are issued at airports or land border crossing points, which grant permission to remain 90 days. All foreign citizens must register with local police within 24 hours of arrival. Those staying in private accommodation or renting an apartment should register in person at the police station nearest his/her place of residence, and should be accompanied to the station by the owner or landlord of the apartment. Hotels are responsible for the registration of foreign guests. If a foreign citizen changes his/her address in Macedonia, s/he should notify the police station where initially registered and re-register with the police station closest to the new place of residence.

An unaccompanied minor U.S. citizen who enters Macedonia should be in possession of a parental or guardian statement of consent to enter and stay in the country. The statement of consent must be certified by a competent authority of the country from which s/he arrives or by a diplomatic or consular mission of the Republic of Macedonia abroad.

NOTE: A U.S. citizen who possesses more than one passport is obliged to leave the country with the travel document s/he used for entry into the country.

Temporary residence: Individuals intending to work, study or remain longer than 90 days in Macedonia, must obtain an entry visa **prior to** their arrival in Macedonia. The practice of switching from tourist status to long-term status when already in Macedonia is no longer allowed. Those wanting to do so must leave Macedonia and apply for a long-term visa at a Macedonian Embassy or Consulate. Macedonian visas, as opposed to entry stamps, can **only** be issued at a Macedonian Embassy or Consulate in a foreign country.

American citizens resident in the United States may apply at:

Embassy of the Republic of Macedonia

2129 Wyoming Avenue, NW

Washington, D.C. 20008

Tel: (202) 667-0501

Fax: (202) 667-2131

E-mail: washington@mfa.gov.mk; usoffice@macedonianembassy.org

Website: <http://www.macedonianembassy.org>

The passport should be valid for at least three months longer than the validity of the visa.

A foreigner to whom a long-term visa is issued should visit the nearest police station within five (5) days of his/her entry into Macedonia. The police station will issue the foreigner a temporary residence permit within twenty-five (25) days. In Skopje, foreigners may go to the Sector for Foreigners, located on the 9th floor of the Macedonian Radio and Television Building, located at Boulevard Goce Delcev, bb; tel: (02) 311-6678 or 311-7766. The office is open Tuesdays and Thursdays between 9:00 a.m. and 12:00 p.m. Foreigners residing in Macedonia and whose temporary residence permits are about to expire should extend their permits following the same procedure at the nearest police station.

For additional information about the procedures for visa issuance or to submit a visa application, please contact the nearest Embassy or Consulate of the Republic of Macedonia. The list of diplomatic and consular missions of the Republic of Macedonia abroad can be found at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' website at www.mfa.gov.mk.

IDENTITY THEFT AND YOUR TAX RECORDS

How can someone steal your identity? Identity theft occurs when someone uses your personal information such as your name, social security number, or other identifying information, without your permission, to commit fraud or other crimes.

Identity theft is a serious crime. People whose identities have been stolen can spend months or years - and their hard-earned money - cleaning up the mess thieves have made of their good name and credit record. In the meantime, victims may lose job opportunities, have loans refused, or even get arrested for crimes they didn't commit.

Generally, identity thieves use someone's personal data to steal his or her financial accounts and run up charges on the victim's existing credit cards, but the IRS has identified other potential areas where this type of fraud may occur as they relate directly to your tax records.

Undocumented workers or other individuals may use your social security number to get a job. That person's employer would report W-2 wages earned using your information to the IRS so it might appear that you did not report all of your income on your return.

- An identity thief may file a tax return using your social security number to receive a refund or stimulus payment.

- If the thief already filed a return using your social security number, the IRS will believe that you already filed and received your refund, and the return you just submitted is a second copy or duplicate.
- If you do receive a notice from the IRS that leads you to believe someone may have used your social security number fraudulently, please notify the IRS immediately by responding to the name and number printed on the notice or letter.

Be alert to possible identity theft if the notice or letter states that:

- more than one tax return for you was filed, or
- IRS records indicate you received wages from an employer unknown to you.

If you receive a notice, contact the IRS either by phone or in writing as directed in that notice. IRS tax examiners will work with you and other agencies, such as the Social Security Administration, to help resolve the problem.

The IRS does not initiate taxpayer communications through e-mail:

- The IRS does not request detailed personal information through e-mail.
- The IRS does not send e-mail requesting your PIN numbers, passwords or similar access information for credit cards, banks or other financial accounts.

If you receive an e-mail from someone claiming to be the IRS or directing you to an IRS site,

- Do not reply.
- Do not open any attachments. Attachments may contain malicious code that will infect your computer.
- Do not click on any links.

Phishing is the act of sending an e-mail to a user falsely claiming to be an established, legitimate enterprise in an attempt to scam the user into surrendering private information that will be used for identity theft.

- If you receive an e-mail or find a website you think is pretending to be the IRS:
- Forward the e-mail or website URL to the IRS at phishing@irs.gov.

You can forward the message as received or provide the Internet header in the e-mail. The Internet header has additional information to help the IRS locate the sender.

After you forward the e-mail or header information to the IRS, delete the message.

Though you can't prevent identity theft entirely, you can minimize your risk.

Protect your social security number:

- Don't carry your social security number (SSN); leave it in a secure place.
- Only give your SSN when absolutely necessary.
- Your employer and financial institution may need your SSN for wage and tax reporting purposes.

- Don't give a business your SSN just because they ask for it. Find out why before giving it out.
- Ask why your SSN is needed and if other types of identifiers can be used.

Additional Information

For more information on identity theft and your tax records, please visit www.irs.gov , and use the words “Identity Theft” in the search block.

TSA EXPANDS POPULAR FAMILY LANES TO EVERY AIRPORT IN AMERICA

On November 10, the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) announced the expansion of its popular “family lane” concept to every security checkpoint in America.

The lanes, part of TSA’s Diamond Self-Select program currently at 48 airports, allow families, individuals unfamiliar with air travel procedures and travelers with special needs to go through security at their own pace. Individuals carrying medically necessary liquids, aerosols and gels in excess of three ounces will also be directed to these lanes. Individuals traveling with liquids, gels and aerosols within the 3-1-1 limits will experience no change in their screening procedures.

The introduction of lanes that will serve as both family lanes and dedicated lanes for passengers carrying medically necessary liquids strengthens TSA efforts to build a network of technology to detect liquid explosives.

Officers staffing these dedicated family lanes will use their training and explosive detection technologies to work with passengers to quickly and efficiently complete the screening process. Individuals traveling with medically necessary liquids, gels and aerosols like baby formula, insulin, cough syrup, contact lens solution and prescription medications will undergo additional screening that will usually take less than two minutes to ensure these items do not pose a threat.

Liquid explosives are still a relevant security concern. Restrictions on quantities of liquids, gels and aerosols carried onboard aircraft were implemented in August 2006. Technological innovations will allow a review of current procedures by the fall of 2009.

For more information on checkpoint security, please visit www.tsa.gov .

THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE PASSPORT APPLICATION WIZARD

When applying for a passport at the U.S. Embassy in Skopje, the American Citizen Services unit recommends that all applicants visit the online Passport Application Wizard (<https://pptform.state.gov/>). The Wizard will help you determine which form you need (Form DS-11, DS-82, DS-5504 or DS-4085), then help you to complete the form online, estimate your payment, and generate the form for you to print and submit.

Also, if your passport is ever lost or stolen, you can use the Wizard to print out a Statement Regarding Lost or Stolen Passport (DS-64). And if you are applying for a

child's passport and both parents cannot sign the application together, you can use the Wizard to print out a Statement of Consent (DS-3053).

ELECTRONIC SYSTEM FOR TRAVEL AUTHORIZATION (ESTA) ADVISORY STATEMENT

Beginning January 12, 2009, all nationals and citizens of Visa Waiver Program (VWP) countries (a list of VWP countries is available at http://travel.state.gov/visa/temp/without/without_1990.html) will be required by law to obtain a travel authorization prior to initiating travel to the United States under the VWP. This authorization may be obtained online through the Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA), a free Internet application administered by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) through a U.S. government website. This program does not apply to U.S. citizens, but will apply to any friends or family members who hold passports from VWP countries. ESTA differs from the Global Entry pilot program offered by DHS, which is discussed below.

DHS does not charge VWP travelers a fee for completion of an ESTA application. Eligible visitors seeking to travel to the United States under the VWP must apply for travel authorization via the ESTA Web site at <https://esta.cbp.dhs.gov>.

VWP travelers should be aware that unauthorized third-parties have established Web sites that attempt to charge visitors seeking to travel to the United States under the VWP or for information about ESTA and for submitting ESTA applications to DHS on behalf of the traveler. These businesses and websites are not endorsed by, associated with, or affiliated in any way with DHS or the United States Government. Again, the United States Government does **not** charge a fee to obtain information about, apply for, or obtain a travel authorization through the ESTA Web site. Use of a private service to apply for travel authorization via ESTA will not expedite the granting of approval.

The ESTA application website is available in 16 languages and includes a help section that provides additional information for VWP travelers to guide them through the application process. Additional information about ESTA may be found at <http://www.cbp.gov/esta>.

GLOBAL ENTRY PILOT PROGRAM

The Department of Homeland Security's Global Entry is a customer service and security program designed to expedite the screening and processing of pre-approved, low-risk travelers entering the United States. Currently only U.S. citizens and lawful permanent residents (LPRs) are eligible to join.

The program is available at Chicago O'Hare International, George Bush Intercontinental (Houston), Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International, John F. Kennedy International (New York), Los Angeles International, Miami International, and Washington Dulles International Airports. Global Entry applicants voluntarily provide their biographic and biometric information, undergo a background check and complete an interview with a U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officer. Once accepted, Global Entry travelers

can use a kiosk at any of the pilot airports to verify their identity electronically and make any needed customs declarations.

Individuals may apply to the Global Entry pilot program online at <https://goes-app.cbp.dhs.gov/>.

LEAVING MACEDONIA?

If you are departing from Macedonia after a long stay here, and you formally registered your stay with the U.S. Embassy in Skopje, please be sure to "cancel" your registration when you leave Macedonia.

If you have registered online, you can cancel your registration yourself by visiting the following website: <http://travelregistration.state.gov>, or by e-mailing us at consularskopje@state.gov

SEASON'S GREETINGS

As the Holiday Season is approaching, the American Embassy would like to take this opportunity to wish you and your family healthy, joyful and bright holidays, and a prosperous and peaceful New Year.



This newsletter is an unofficial and informal source of practical information for American citizens residing in Macedonia. If you have comments, questions, or suggestions, please contact the Consular Section at (02) 311-6180, or at consularskopje@state.gov. This newsletter is also available on the American Citizens Services page of our website at <http://macedonia.usembassy.gov>